APPENDIX E

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING
SUCCESSFUL CDBG APPLICATIONS

1. **Thoroughly understand the CDBG requirements and ranking criteria. Call CDBG for assistance.** Montana's CDBG Application Guidelines try to explain the basic requirements of the program and the five ranking criteria in Chapter V. **If you have any questions or anything is unclear to you -- call the Department of Commerce CDBG staff as soon as you have questions.**

2. **Thoroughly respond to each of the applicable ranking issues and all requirements listed under each of the five ranking criteria**. These five criteria, as described in Chapter V of the *CDBG Housing Application Guidelines,* are precisely the ones the MDOC application ranking teams will be comparing your application against. Present the evidence that supports each of your claims.

3. **Approach the Application Guidelines methodically, step-by-step.** Use the Application Guidelines like a checklist. Be sure to address all parts of each of ranking criterion – i.e., each of the requirements and application ranking issues within each ranking criterion. If you are sure a requirement or application ranking issue does not apply to your project, be sure to respond to each with "NA" (not applicable). If you're not sure, contact CDBG staff to request a clarification.

4. **Form a Steering Committee or Task Force. Set up a calendar for completion.** While it usually works best to have one person responsible for writing and assembling the application, **preparation of a competitive CDBG application is often not a one-person job but requires the work of a team whose members are all familiar with the CDBG application guidelines and ranking**. After you have determined which requirements will apply, break the tasks into individual assignments. Put together a calendar to make sure you have the time to get all the required tasks done, and schedule completion dates for each task.

5. **If you were an unsuccessful applicant previously, make arrangements with Department of Commerce CDBG staff to review the ranking comments concerning your previous application. Find out what areas needed to be improved and be sure to address each of them.** What were the differences in the successful applications that caused them to be ranked higher? You can also borrow copies of successful applications for similar projects to get ideas on how to prepare a stronger application. Even if your application received a maximum score on a particular ranking criterion, review your response to see if it can be strengthened further. The application ranking process is based on a comparison of the applications submitted. There is no guarantee that your application overall will receive the same score that it did the previous year.

6. **Take a holistic approach to describing your project**. Several of the CDBG ranking criteria consider interrelated issues. The strongest applications often approach each of the 5 ranking criteria as components of a coordinated, overall strategy rather than as separate and distinct responses to stand-alone issues. Keep all the ranking criteria in mind at each stage in preparing the overall application

narrative. A key concept, such as public involvement or your community's long-term approach to planning and managing housing problems and issues, can be integrated throughout the application. This can actually help make the narrative shorter, too. If the narrative response to a CDBG ranking criterion flows from the previous discussion, you won't have to repeat key information -- just tell the reviewer where the issue has already been covered.

7. **Be concise and well organized.** Excessively lengthy applications can hurt because it makes it more difficult for the reviewer to follow the key points you are trying to make if they are buried in a lot of paper. Make sure that any exhibits you include really support your proposal and present evidence that supports your assertions and are not just filler. **A succinct, well organized application with a logical progression of ideas and clearly labeled and easy-to-locate exhibits with good and relevant evidence makes it easier to understand the case you are making for your community**. Follow the required application format presented in *Appendix D* (Section B). Use the checklists that are provided – the General Requirements checklist (*Appendix F)* and the Special Requirements checklist (*Appendix G).*

8. **Be complete. Present all of the relevant evidence. Answer all of the questions and all parts of each question. Tell the whole story. Make your case.** Don't assume that the people who will review your application know your community or your situation. Present all the relevant evidence that supports each of your claims. The ranking team will be composed of Department of Commerce staff that may not be familiar with your community or the details of your situation. Describe the details and circumstances and evidence for the case you are making clearly and thoroughly. Your application must speak for itself, so include all the narrative and evidence you need to make a strong case for your project. Anticipate all the likely questions that might be asked and address each of them so that you make your case as strong as possible. You can accomplish this while still providing a simple and straightforward narrative that avoids unnecessary repetition.

9. **Arrange for impartial reviews of your draft application.** A preliminary draft of the application should be reviewed by others (not CDBG staff) who are not closely involved with the application and who have looked at and are familiar with the CDBG guidelines. They can serve as your editors – they can raise questions or spot gaps or inconsistencies in your arguments that you may not be able to see because you are too close to the project to be aware of them. Getting others involved can bring in a fresh perspective that may question some of your assumptions or see weaknesses that you cannot. Have your reviewers check both your early draft and your final draft against the CDBG Application Guidelines and against the checklists in *Appendix F* and *Appendix G*. Make sure that all your attachments (exhibits, appendices) are included before you send it to CDBG.

10. **Document knowledgeable, broad community support**. The CDBG program encourages public involvement in both the preparation of and implementation of local CDBG projects. The support of residents and others in the surrounding community is critical, not only to your grant application, but also to your project's success. You can strengthen your application with support letters and statements that not only show general community support for your project and the specifics of your project, but, if appropriate, also describe local resources that will help make the project a success (for example, contribution of in-kind services, funds, or volunteer efforts).